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Jewel Cave National Monument News Release

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Jewel Cave Changes Reservation Process in 2013

Custer, SD – Although summer is in the distant future, Jewel Cave National Monument is gearing up for an exciting year with a few construction projects. Yet, the projects are also expected to impact visitor experiences. For this reason, the Monument has announced that it will not be taking advanced ticket reservations this year. Except for Wild Caving Tours, all other tour tickets are being sold on a first come, first serve basis.

The South Dakota Department of Transportation is set to work on Highway 16 through the Monument, beginning in June. The roadwork is focused on straightening the sharp curves just east of the visitor center entrance. It is also planned to include wider pull-offs and shoulders. The design makes for a safer driving experience and also protects the cave resource by creating a more efficient travel corridor for large trucks.

Superintendent Larry Johnson states, "The planning and design steps have been completed, and we are excited to see the highway transition over the summer months. The DOT has been very accommodating of our suggestions, and they continue to be supportive with our visitor experience concerns later this year." The highway is scheduled for completion in the fall.

The parking lot near the visitor center is also slated for construction, beginning in the early spring. The original cement lot dates back to the early 1970s and needs repairs. Furthermore, the parking lot does not filter the contaminants from vehicles, which allows petro-chemicals to potentially seep into the cave. The new parking area addresses resource protection through a filter system. It also provides safer walkways and enhanced picnic areas for visitors during the hectic summer season. Johnson further comments, "Upon completion of the parking lot, we believe that our future visitors will experience a positive first impression. The picnic spaces will extend the length of time on site for visitors, and the overall filtering system under the parking area preserves and protects the fragile cave features."

Superintendent Johnson states, "Although both projects will make for better visitor experiences in the future, we do realize that the construction may delay visitor traffic. Since our programming schedule offers specific tour times, some visitors may arrive late and miss their cave tour. Because of this, we feel as though a first come first serve approach for ticket sales will make for better customer service."

During the winter season, Scenic Tours are offered daily at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Discovery Tours are also offered daily at 9:05 a.m., 12:45 p.m., and 3:45 p.m. Interested guests are encouraged to contact the visitor center at 605-673-8300 for additional information and to learn how best to plan their visit. The visitor center is open daily during the off-season from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Online information is available at www.nps.gov/jeca.

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